RANI DURGAVATI

She chose to be the wife of a brave, 'low-born' hero, rather than of a spineless 'high-born' fool. This was indeed fortunate for the people of Garha, for they gained a queen who could befuddle even the mightiest of Mughal armies. Her intelligence and courage were unmatched. But this made the Mughal general, Asaf Khan, all the more determined to subdue her.

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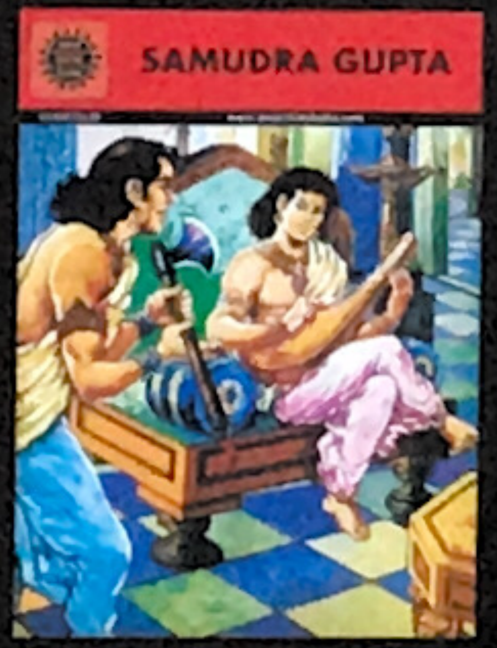

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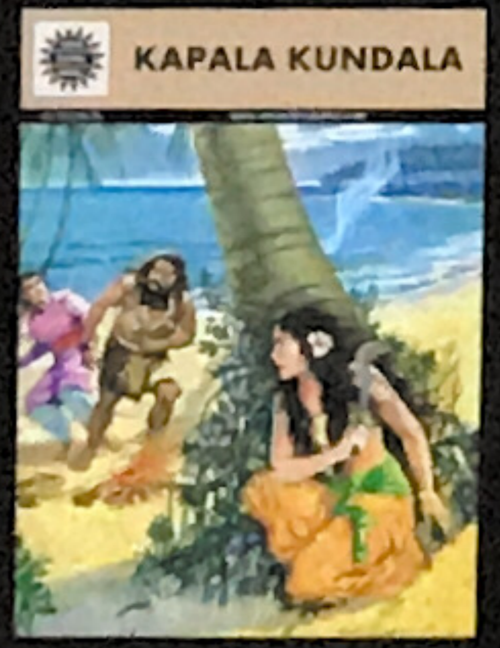

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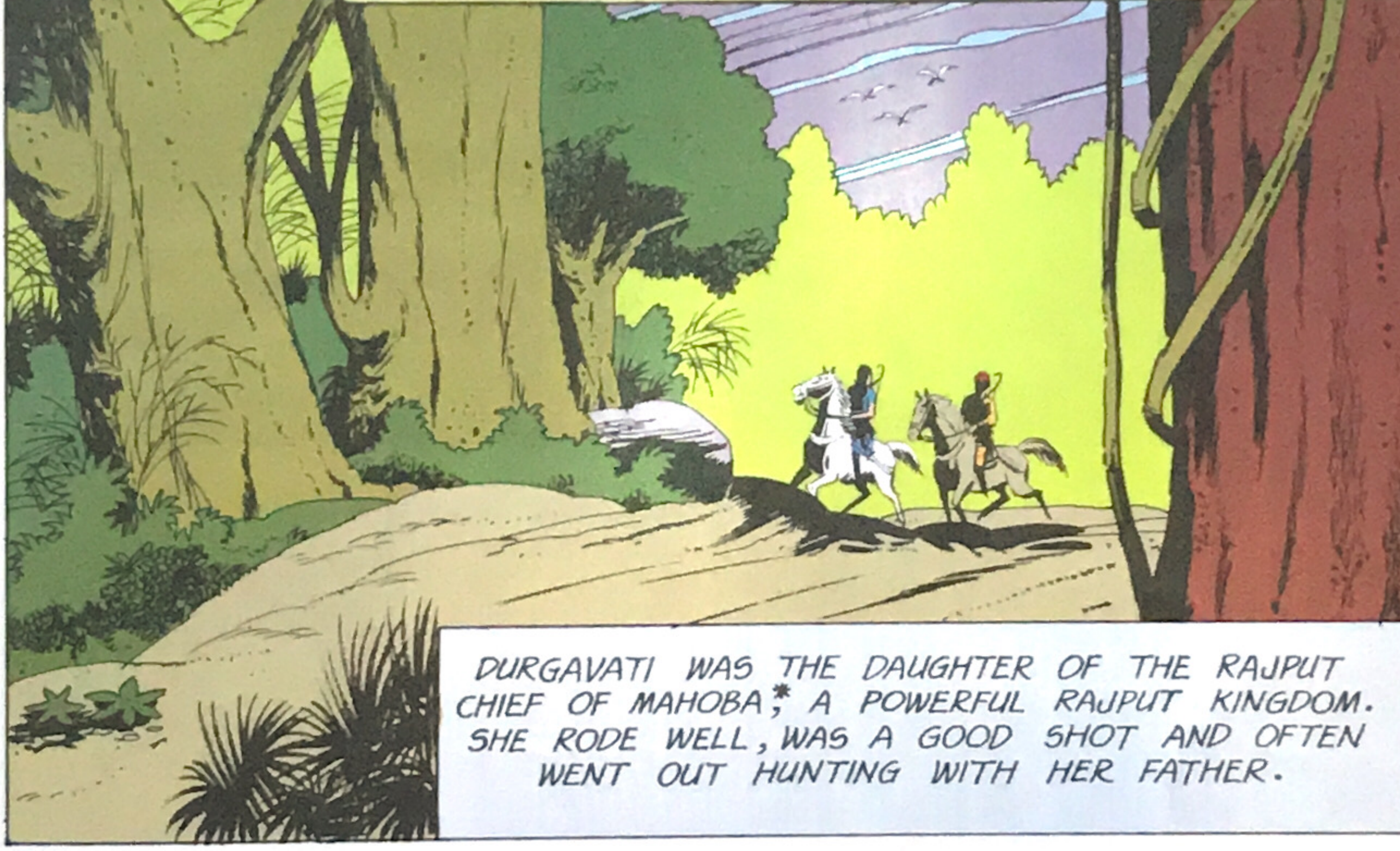
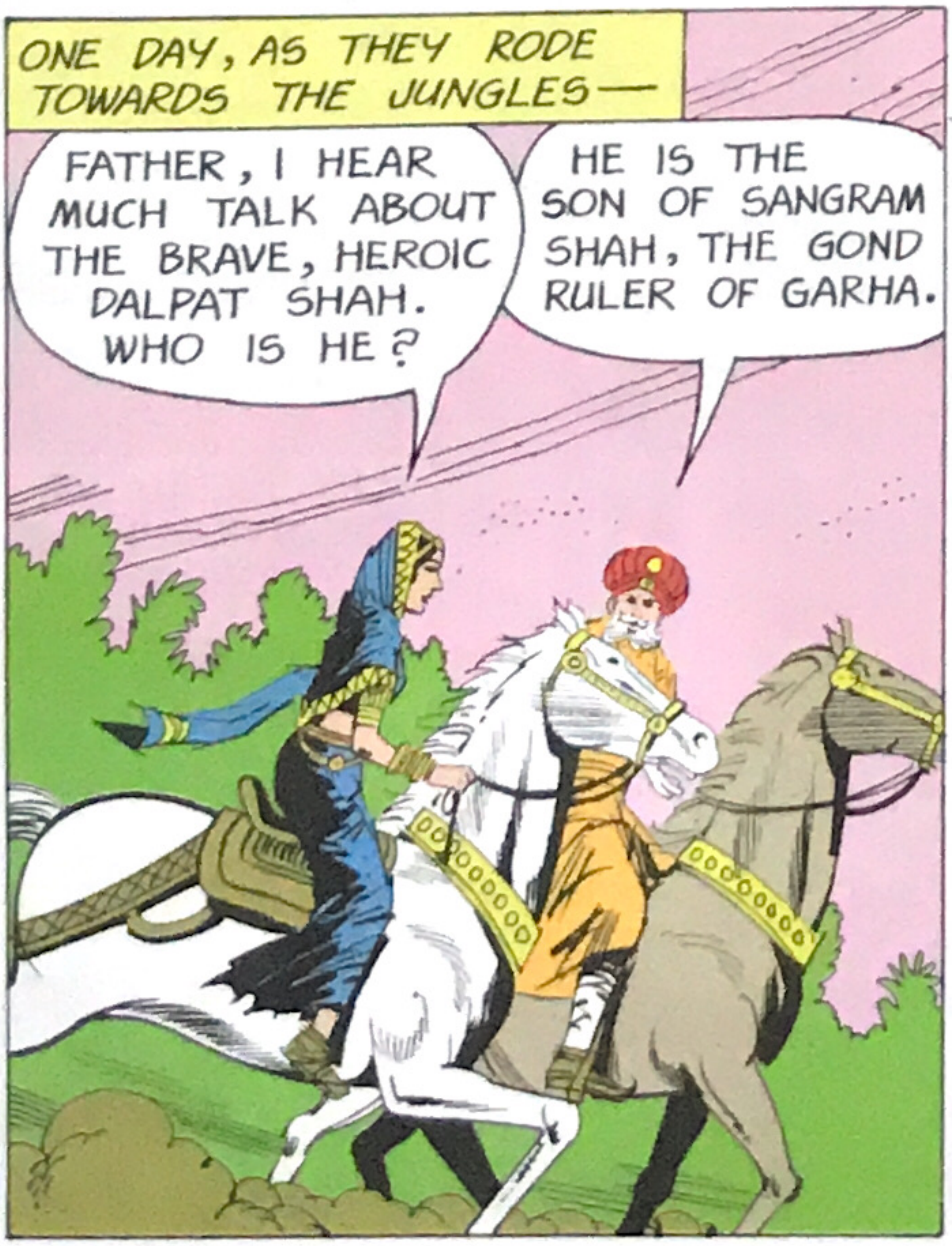
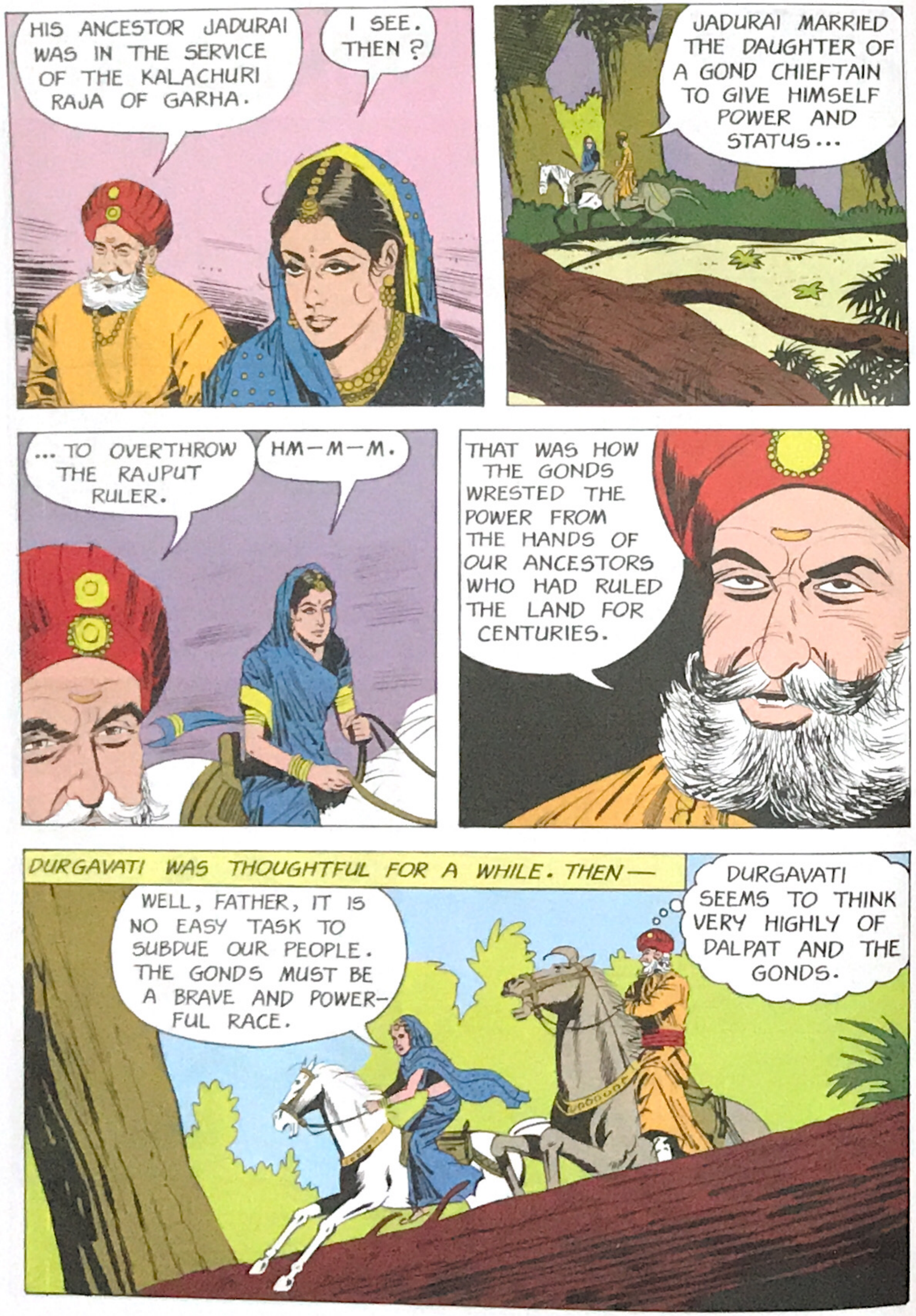
RANI DURGAVATI






HIS ANCESTOR JADURAI WAS IN THE SERVICE OF THE KALACHURI RAJA OF GARHA.
I SEE. THEN?
JADURAI MARRIED THE DAUGHTER OF A GOND CHIEFTAIN TO GIVE HIMSELF POWER AND STATUS...
...TO OVERTHROW THE RAJPUT RULER.
HM-M-M.
THAT WAS HOW THE GONDS WRESTED THE POWER FROM THE HANDS OF OUR ANCESTORS WHO HAD RULED THE LAND FOR CENTURIES.
DURGAVATI WAS THOUGHTFUL FOR A WHILE. THEN—
WELL, FATHER, IT IS NO EASY TASK TO SUBDUE OUR PEOPLE. THE GONDS MUST BE A BRAVE AND POWER-FUL RACE.
DURGAVATI SEEMS TO THINK VERY HIGHLY OF DALPAT AND THE GONDS.

MEANWHILE AT GARHA—
ARE YOU READY, DALPAT?
YES, FATHER. LET'S GO.
I AM IMPATIENT TO SEE YOUR ARROWS EMBEDDED IN THE TIGER'S FLESH.
AFTER THEY HAD RIDDEN SOME DISTANCE—
LOOK OUT, DALPAT. THERE HE IS.
BUT EVEN BEFORE SANGRAM COULD SPEAK, DALPAT HAD RAISED HIS BOW.

HE SENT THE ARROW FLYING.
SANGRAM'S HEART SWELLED WITH PRIDE.
MY HANDSOME, DARING, MANLY SON. YOU SHALL MARRY A PRINCESS WORTHY OF YOU.
I CAN THINK OF NO BETTER MATCH THAN DURGAVATI, THE PRINCESS OF MAHOBA.

SANGRAM SHAH SENT A PROPOSAL TO DURGAVATI'S FATHER.
IT WOULD BE AN HONOUR FOR US TO ENTER INTO AN ALLIANCE WITH YOUR PEOPLE. I SEEK THE HAND OF YOUR DAUGHTER, THE FAIR DURGAVATI, FOR MY SON, DALPAT. — SANGRAM SHAH
DALPAT IS A PRINCE, NO DOUBT. BUT A PRINCESS OF THE FAMOUS CHANDELA DYNASTY TO MARRY A MERE GOND? NO! NEVER! IT MAY BE AN HONOUR FOR YOU, SANGRAM SHAH. BUT IT WOULD MEAN DISGRACE FOR OUR FAMILY.
AND DURGAVATI'S FATHER REPLIED, EXPRESSING HIS REGRETS.
TAKE THIS TO YOUR CHIEF.

MEANWHILE, THE MAID RAN TO DURGAVATI.
YOUR HAND HAS BEEN SOUGHT BY THE GOND RULER FOR HIS SON.
DALPAT ?
YES !
WHAT DID MY FATHER SAY ?
THE MAID SHOOK HER HEAD SADLY.
HE WAS VERY UNKIND.
HOW ? WHAT DID HE SAY ? WHAT DID HE DO ?
HE SAID... HE SAID... IT WOULD BE A DISGRACE TO GIVE A DAUGHTER OF THE FAMOUS CHANDELA DYNASTY TO A GOND, PRINCE THOUGH HE BE.

MY FATHER IS WRONG. A MAN SHOULD BE JUDGED, NOT BY HIS BIRTH, BUT BY HIS CHARACTER AND ACHIEVEMENTS.
AS DURGAVATI WALKED TOWARDS THE PALACE, SHE MADE A DECISION.
I WILL MARRY DALPAT, COME WHAT MAY ! IT IS BETTER TO BE THE WIFE OF A BRAVE, LOW-BORN HERO THAN OF A SPINELESS, HIGH-BORN FOOL !
SHE WROTE TO DALPAT.
... SOCIAL BARRIERS ARE ABSURD. IN YOU I HAVE FOUND A HERO AFTER MY OWN HEART. IT IS MY SINCERE HOPE THAT YOU WILL PERSIST IN YOUR EFFORTS TO WIN MY HAND...

SHE TURNED TO THE MAID.
TAKE THIS TO THE SON OF THE GOND RULER. AND ... AND... BE DISCREET ABOUT IT.
YOU CAN TRUST ME TO DO THAT, MISTRESS.
MEANWHILE, AT GARHA, NEWS OF THE MAHOBA CHIEF'S REBUFF HAD ALREADY REACHED DALPAT.
WHAT UTTER HUMILIATION! OH, FATHER! WHY DID WE HAVE TO DEMEAN OURSELVES SO?
THERE ARE MANY GOOD GIRLS AMONG OUR OWN PEOPLE. I COULD HAVE MARRIED ONE OF THEM. WHY, O WHY, DID YOU BOW BEFORE THAT HAUGHTY RAJPUT?
AS HE BROODED THUS, THE MAID CAME THERE.
SIR, A MESSAGE FROM MY MISTRESS — DURGAVATI, THE PRINCESS OF MAHOBA.

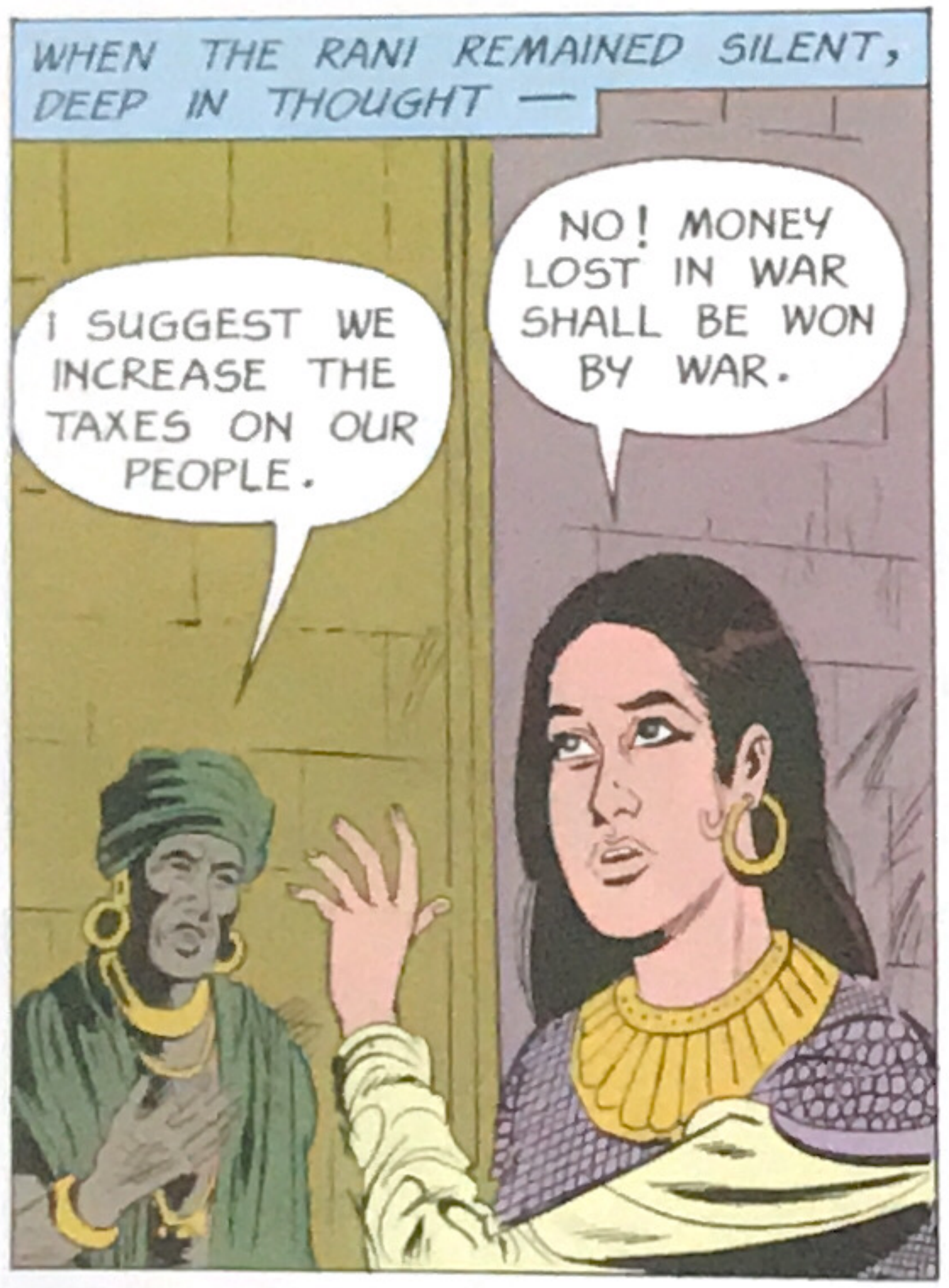
DALPAT READ THE NOTE.
MY FATHER, AFTER ALL, CHOSE NO ORDINARY PRINCESS.
WHAT SHALL I TELL MY MISTRESS, SIR?
TELL HER I SHALL COME.
I WILL, SIR. I WILL.
WHEN THE MAID LEFT, DALPAT WENT TO SANGRAM.
FATHER, I HAVE DECIDED TO MAKE DURGAVATI MY WIFE. WITH HER FATHER'S CONSENT, IF POSSIBLE; WITHOUT IF NECESSARY.
SANGRAM WAS DELIGHTED.
I SHALL ORDER OUR MEN TO GET READY TO MARCH INTO MAHOBA.

LATER, AT MAHOBA —
SIR! SIR! THE GONDS ARE ON THE WARPATH. THEIR PRINCE RIDES THIS WAY AT THE HEAD OF A HUGE ARMY.
THE RAJPUT CHIEF WAS SILENT FOR A WHILE.
IT WOULD BE MORE DIS-CREET TO HAND DURGAVATI OVER PEACEFULLY, THOUGH IT WILL MEAN LOSS OF FACE FOR ME.
THEN HE GAVE ORDERS.
PUT UP THE TRUCE FLAGS. I WILL GO OUT AND WELCOME THE GOND PRINCE. HE IS DURGAVATI'S CHOSEN LORD.
AS YOU SAY, SIR.
THE ORDERS WERE CARRIED OUT.

DALPAT WAS GIVEN A ROYAL WELCOME.
DALPAT, YOU HAVE WON. DURGAVATI SHALL BECOME YOUR BRIDE.
THEN AMIDST GREAT FEASTING AND REJOICING, DURGAVATI WAS MARRIED TO DALPAT.
A FEW DAYS LATER, WITH THE BLESSINGS OF HIS FATHER-IN-LAW, DALPAT SET OUT FOR GARHA WITH HIS BRIDE.

* RAJPUT WOMAN

* A NEIGHBOURING AFGHAN RULER

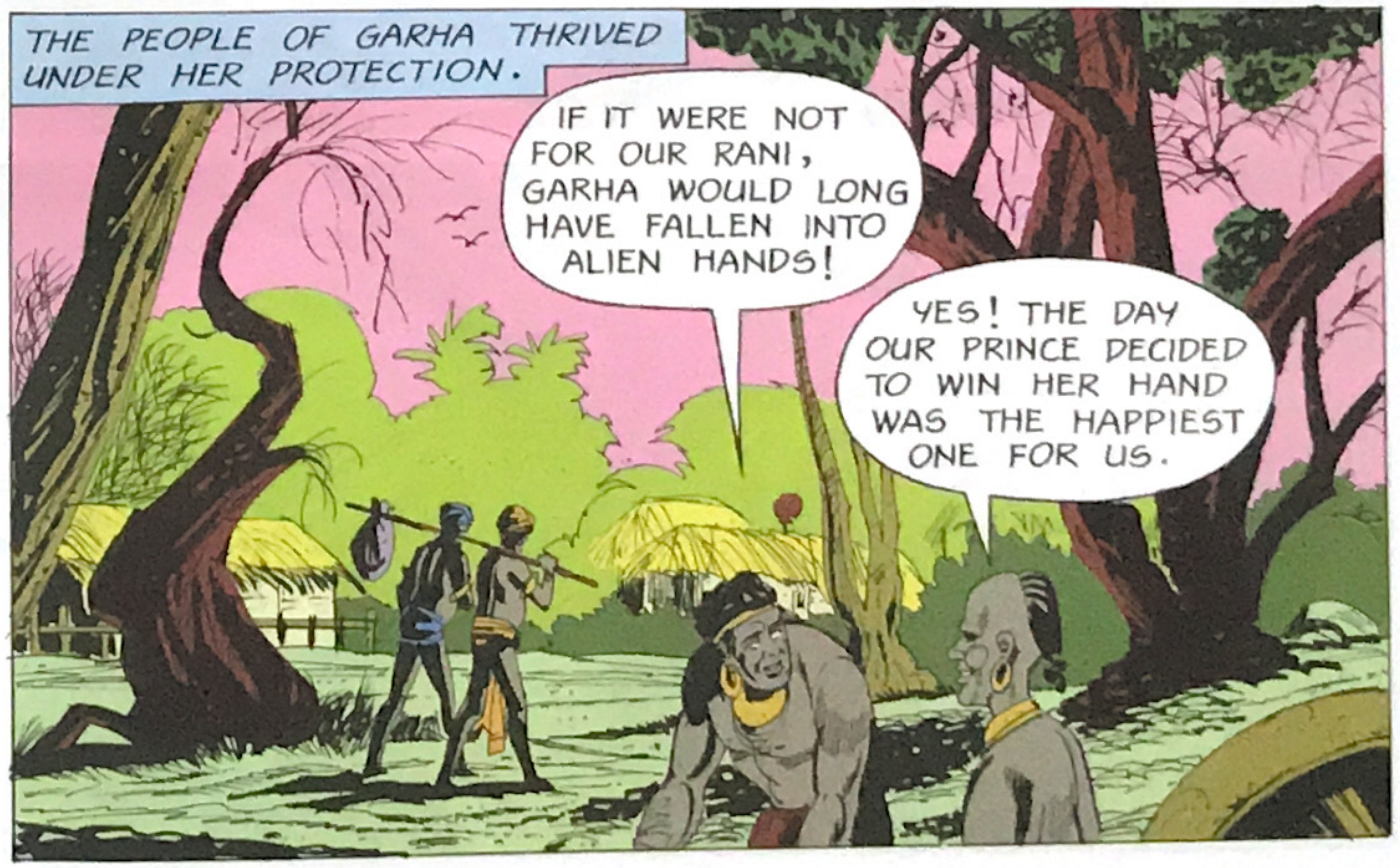

WHEN THE RANI REMAINED SILENT, DEEP IN THOUGHT —
I SUGGEST WE INCREASE THE TAXES ON OUR PEOPLE.
NO! MONEY LOST IN WAR SHALL BE WON BY WAR.

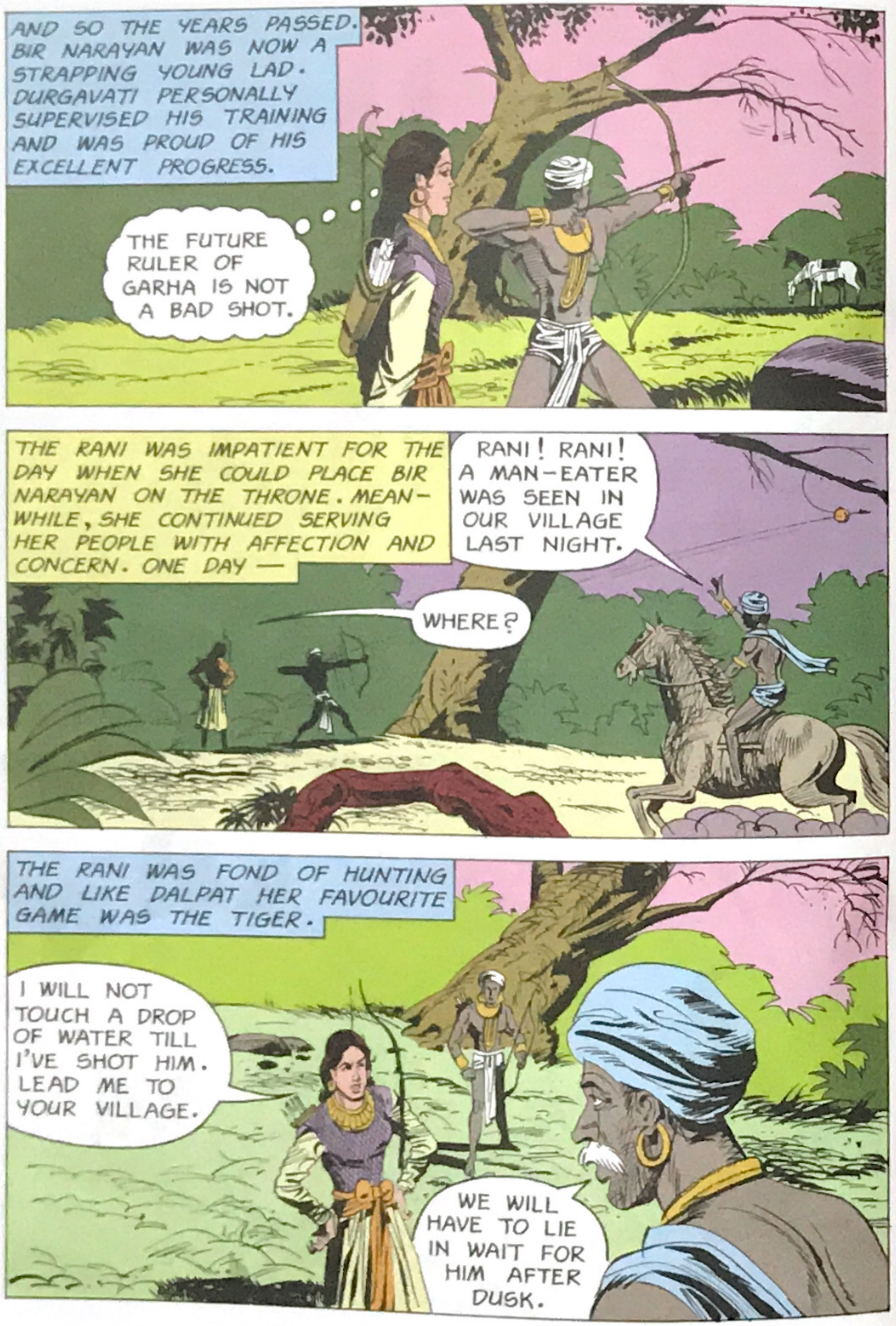
RALLY OUR MEN. WE SHALL ATTACK THE PETTY RAJAS OF THE LAND.

RAJA AFTER RAJA WAS ATTACKED.

AND EACH TIME THE RANI AND HER SOLDIERS WERE THE VICTORS.
CARRY AWAY ALL THE TREASURE YOU CAN FIND. BUT LEAVE THE CITY INTACT.

SOON, THE ONCE EMPTY COFFERS WERE OVERFLOWING WITH WEALTH.
WE CAN NOW TURN OUR ATTENTION TO CIVIL MATTERS AND THE WELFARE OF THE PEOPLE.


THE PEOPLE OF GARHA THRIVED UNDER HER PROTECTION.
IF IT WERE NOT FOR OUR RANI, GARHA WOULD LONG HAVE FALLEN INTO ALIEN HANDS!
YES! THE DAY OUR PRINCE DECIDED TO WIN HER HAND WAS THE HAPPIEST ONE FOR US.

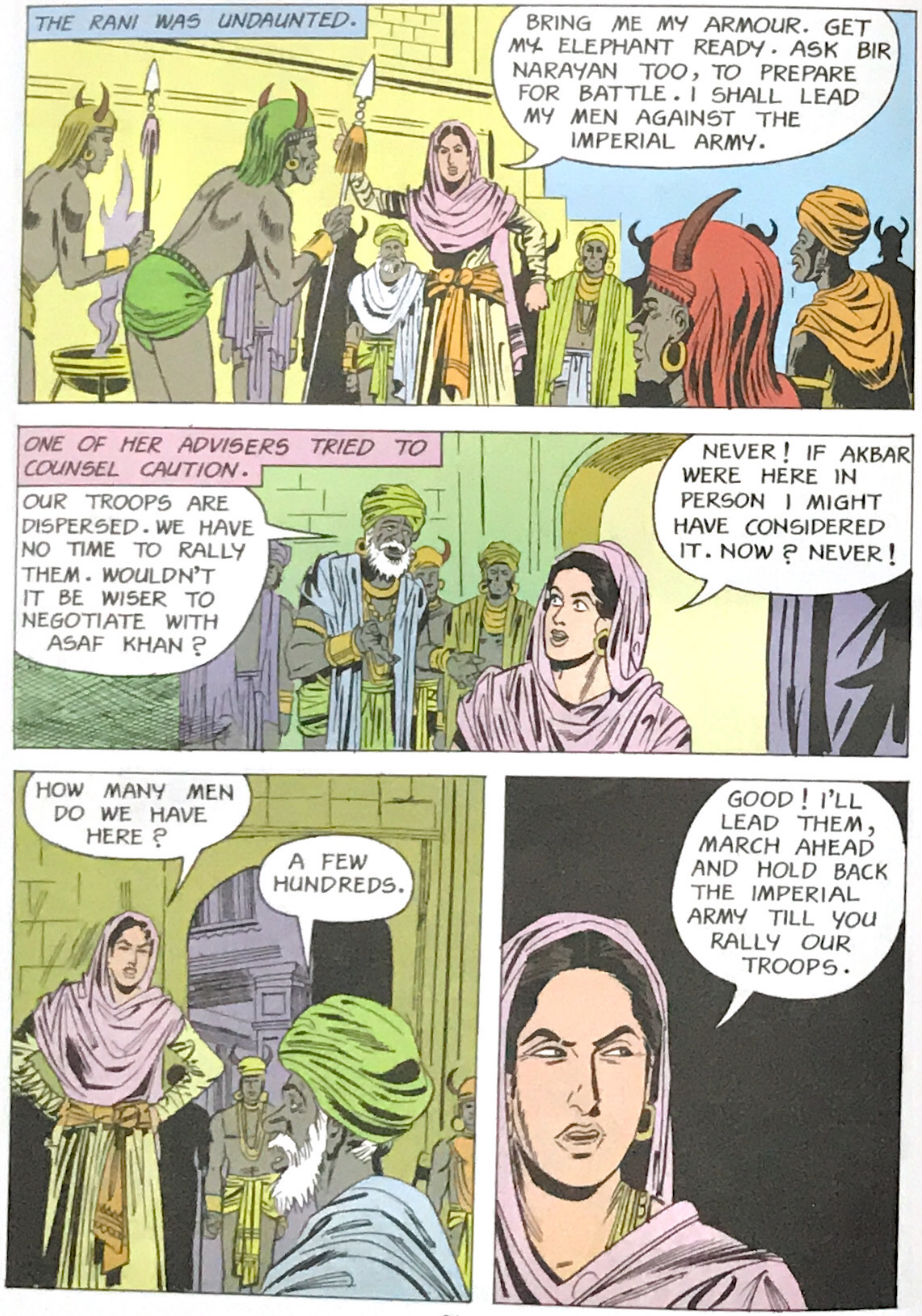

AND SO THE YEARS PASSED. BIR NARAYAN WAS NOW A STRAPPING YOUNG LAD. DURGAVATI PERSONALLY SUPERVISED HIS TRAINING AND WAS PROUD OF HIS EXCELLENT PROGRESS.
THE FUTURE RULER OF GARHA IS NOT A BAD SHOT.
THE RANI WAS IMPATIENT FOR THE DAY WHEN SHE COULD PLACE BIR NARAYAN ON THE THRONE. MEANWHILE, SHE CONTINUED SERVING HER PEOPLE WITH AFFECTION AND CONCERN. ONE DAY —
RANI! RANI! A MAN-EATER WAS SEEN IN OUR VILLAGE LAST NIGHT.
WHERE?
THE RANI WAS FOND OF HUNTING AND LIKE DALPAT HER FAVOURITE GAME WAS THE TIGER.
I WILL NOT TOUCH A DROP OF WATER TILL I'VE SHOT HIM. LEAD ME TO YOUR VILLAGE.
WE WILL HAVE TO LIE IN WAIT FOR HIM AFTER DUSK.

THE RANI MOUNTED HER HORSE AND RODE BEHIND THE VILLAGER.
THEY REACHED THE VILLAGE JUST BEFORE SUNSET. AT DUSK—
LET US WAIT HERE, RANI. IT WILL SOON BE DARK. HE SHOULD COME ANY MOMENT.
SUDDENLY —
YOU CLIMB THAT TREE AND WAIT. I'LL FINISH HIM OFF.
SHE RAISED HER BOW AND TOOK AIM.

THE TIGER, SENSING DANGER, CHARGED TOWARDS THE DISTURBING SCENT.
THE RANI NEATLY AVOIDED HIM ...
...DROPPED HER BOW AND ARROW...
...AND RAISED HER GUN.

BEFORE THE TIGER COULD REALISE WHAT WAS HAPPENING, HE WAS SHOT DEAD.
THE VILLAGER CLAMBERED DOWN THE TREE AND RAN UP TO THE TIGER.
HAVE THE CARCASS CARRIED AWAY AND SEND THE SKIN TO ME.
AND THE RANI RODE BACK TO THE PALACE.

* REFUGE OF THE WORLD


THE RANI WAS UNDAUNTED.
BRING ME MY ARMOUR. GET MY ELEPHANT READY. ASK BIR NARAYAN TOO, TO PREPARE FOR BATTLE. I SHALL LEAD MY MEN AGAINST THE IMPERIAL ARMY.
ONE OF HER ADVISERS TRIED TO COUNSEL CAUTION.
OUR TROOPS ARE DISPERSED. WE HAVE NO TIME TO RALLY THEM. WOULDN'T IT BE WISER TO NEGOTIATE WITH ASAF KHAN ?
NEVER ! IF AKBAR WERE HERE IN PERSON I MIGHT HAVE CONSIDERED IT. NOW ? NEVER !
HOW MANY MEN DO WE HAVE HERE ?
A FEW HUNDREDS.
GOOD ! I'LL LEAD THEM, MARCH AHEAD AND HOLD BACK THE IMPERIAL ARMY TILL YOU RALLY OUR TROOPS.

AND WITHOUT WASTING ANOTHER MOMENT, THE RANI MARCHED OUT WITH HER BRAVE SOLDIERS TO MEET ASAF KHAN AND HIS VAST ARMIES.
AN HOUR LATER—
THAT NARROW GORGE WOULD BE THE IDEAL PLACE FOR US TO STOP THEM.
THE RANI AND HER MEN CROSSED THE RIVER WHICH WAS ALMOST DRY...
...AND SET UP CAMP ON THE OPPOSITE BANK.

AFTER THEY WERE REFRESHED THEY RODE THROUGH THE GORGE TO THE OTHER END.
AFTER THIS SPOT THE GORGE GETS WIDER AND WILL NOT SERVE OUR PURPOSE. TAKE UP YOUR POSITIONS ON THE HILLS ON EITHER SIDE. I WILL REMAIN HERE WITH A FEW MEN.
MEANWHILE, LEARNING OF HER MOVEMENTS ASAF KHAN AND HIS ARMY ADVANCED TOWARDS THE GORGE.
OUR SPIES SAY THAT THE RANI HAS HARDLY A HANDFUL OF MEN.
YET, I WOULD NOT UNDER-ESTIMATE HER.
FROM THE GORGE, THE RANI AND HER MEN WATCHED ASAF KHAN APPROACH.
IMPOSING INDEED IS THE IMPERIAL ARMY! I HOPE MY MEN DON'T LOSE HEART.

THE TWO ARMIES MET.
CHARGE! ATTACK! DON'T LET THE SCOUNDRELS DEFILE OUR SOIL.
THE RANI AND HER MEN FOUGHT WITH A FURY THAT ASAF KHAN AND HIS VAST ARMY FOUND DIFFICULT TO MATCH.
HAVE I UNDERESTIMATED THE RANI?
BY EVENING, ASAF KHAN'S ARMY WAS TOTALLY ROUTED.
WE HAVE LOST FAR TOO MANY MEN. LET US RETURN TO CAMP.
PURSUE THE FUGITIVES. CHASE THEM OUT OF OUR SACRED SOIL.

WHEN THE LAST OF THE MUGHALS WAS CHASED AWAY —
WE MUST EITHER RETURN TO CAMP AND MAKE A SURPRISE ATTACK AT NIGHT OR REMAIN HERE TILL DAYBREAK TO RENEW THE BATTLE.
I DON'T THINK THEY WILL RETURN TO FIGHT. OUR MEN ARE TIRED. LET US GO BACK TO CAMP AND REST TONIGHT.
IF WE DO, ASAF KHAN WILL SCALE THE HILLS BY MORNING AND POST HIS ARTILLERY ON THEM.
I THINK THE RANI IS RIGHT.
ASAF KHAN WILL NOT RETURN.
THE OLD COUNSELLOR INSISTED AND HIS WORD PREVAILED.
THE NEXT MORNING, WHAT THE RANI HAD PREDICTED HAPPENED. TO MAKE MATTERS WORSE, THE SKIES WERE DARK AND THE CLOUDS THREATENED TO BURST ANY MOMENT.
COURAGE, MY MEN. WE WILL NOT GIVE UP. LET US ATTACK. I WILL LEAD YOU.

AS THE RANI, MOUNTED ON HER BEST ELEPHANT, LED THE CHARGE, THE RAIN CAME DOWN IN TORRENTS.
BIR NARAYAN WAS AMONG THE FIRST TO BE WOUNDED.
TAKE HIM AWAY TO SAFETY.
MANY OF THE SOLDIERS, WHO WERE LOSING HEART, TOOK ADVANTAGE OF THE SITUATION.
LET US GO WITH HIM AND SAVE OUR LIVES TOO, WHILE WE CAN.
YES. THE RANI IS RECKLESS. SHE SHOULD NEGOTIATE.

THE RANI, HOWEVER, FOUGHT ON. AN ARROW PIERCED HER TEMPLE BUT SHE PULLED IT OUT AND ...
... CONTINUED FIGHTING.
ANOTHER ARROW PIERCED HER NECK. SHE COULD HARDLY SIT ON HER ELEPHANT.
WHATEVER COURAGE MY MEN HAVE, WILL VANISH WHEN THEY SEE ME WOUNDED. IT WOULD BE WISER NOW TO RETREAT AND FIGHT FROM MY FORTRESS.
BUT THE RANI WAS NOT FATED TO WORK OUT HER PLAN. WHEN SHE REACHED THE RIVER BANK —
WE CANNOT GO ACROSS. THE RIVER HAS RISEN AND IS UNFORDABLE.

THE RANI HAD TO THINK FAST. THE ENEMY WAS CLOSING IN UPON HER.
RANI, PLEASE LET ME TAKE YOU TO A SAFE PLACE.
THE RANI SCORNED HIS SUGGESTION.
AND PERCHANCE FALL INTO THE HANDS OF THE ENEMY. NO! I AM OVER-COME IN BATTLE. GOD FORBID THAT I ALSO BE OVERCOME IN NAME AND HONOUR.
SHE PULLED OUT HER DAGGER.
I WOULD RATHER DIE IN HONOUR THAN LIVE IN DISGRACE.
AND LIKE THE TRUE RAJPUTNI THAT SHE WAS, THE PROUD RANI STABBED HERSELF.